19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7



171
197

in a bundle of old clothes. Long after nightfall, stealthily by ones and twos, men and women came to his house. Guards were posted outside of the village, and the bundle was brought out and unwrapped until, by the dim light of a wick burning in an earthen cup filled with oil, the books were disclosed, including a Bible that was regarded as the now recovered Lost Book. At the sight of this unspeakable treasure some of those present bowed down and worshiped, others wept, some touched and caressed the sacred book, some kissed it, and some gazed long and curiously at its title. They crowded around the volume so thickly that the chief lifted it high above his head, in order that all might see, and all gazed at it with bated breath. They had been permitted to witness the return of their book, and they believed that they were no longer to be members of a despised nation.[6]

[198]

The years just preceding the annexation of Pegu by the British Empire, were hard ones for the Karen Christians. Their faith was severely tested by persecutions. Thra Klaw Meh, pastor of a Bassein church, and the converts of his village were imprisoned for their acceptance of the new religion. Their friends collected a handsome sum for their ransom, and all but the pastor were released. He was ordered to give up preaching, but, refusing to do so, was subjected to torture for days and finally was disemboweled and shot. Others were much persecuted, many suffering martyrdom both before and after the Second Burmese War.[7] Until Pegu was annexed by the British Government in 1853, no missionaries were allowed to remain permanently in Lower Burma. Hitherto the work for Bassein had been directed by the Rev. E. A. Abbott and his associates from Sandoway, in Arracan, and that for Rangoon and vicinity had been supervised from Moulmein. But as soon as the country was opened to resident missionaries, Dr. J. H. Vinton removed to Rangoon and established the headquarters of the mission there, near Mission Road, where his descendants are still supervising the activities of some ten thousand Karen Christians. The Rev. E. A. Abbott removed to Bassein and put the mission work of that district on a permanent and self-supporting basis. He has

[6] Thra Than Dya, then a little boy, went with his mother to see the Book on this notable occasion.

[7] In the Rangoon district Thra Ng Lay escaped martyrdom only through the accession of a new governor, whose first official act was to release him on the eve of his execution day. However, persecution did not deter such men or their descendants from becoming preachers. Both Thra Klaw Meh and Thra Ng Lay have had sons in the ministry, and their grandsons have since been in the Theological Seminary at Rangoon, preparing for the same calling.